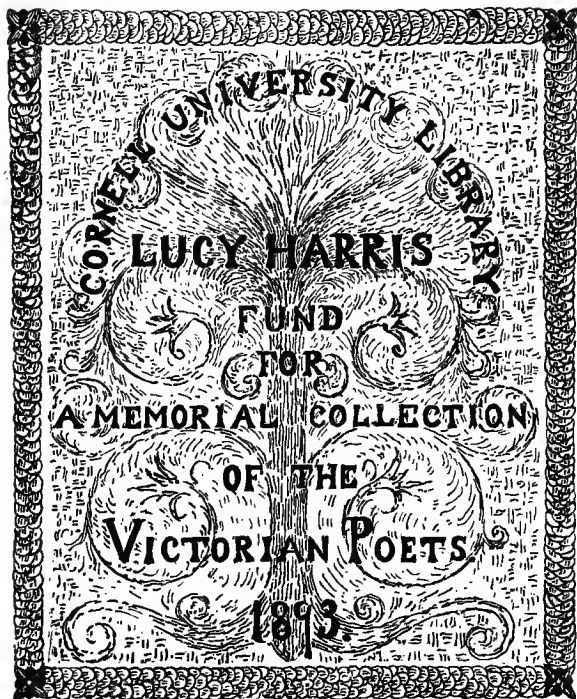




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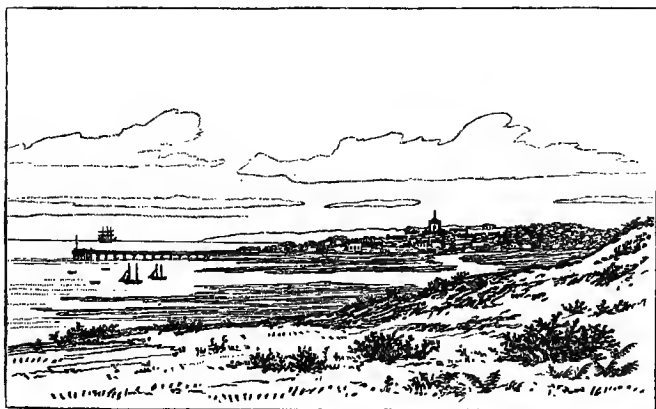
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IN A VILLAGE

IN A VILLAGE

BY
A. Fleck
JOHN A. BRIDGES
AUTHOR OF "WET DAYS," ETC.



LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

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JOHN A. BRIDGES.

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Or a woman acts an angel's part—as many so fain
would do—

I seem for a moment to grasp their hands—brother
and sister too.

When praise writes fair, or censure blots the familiar
local name,

I am present with glad or downcast eyes to share in
the joy or blame.

When brave men steer from that humble port for
breakers they cannot stem,

I stand on the deck of the sinking boat, and my heart
goes down with them.

Something hallows it. Distance, I fear, gives it that
shadowy grace ;

Mistily thus with a memory gilds the bricks of an
uncouth place ;

Mellows the past as age is found to soften the strong
rough wine ;

Gives brightness to days which were cloudy enough,
makes dear dull souls run fine.

Yes, they were common, and yet I think they had
what the great have not ;

Beauty, nobility, tenderness, strength, fashioned their
simple lot.

Strange and old-world things, gone out with the odd
little coat I wore.

It was but the place of my birth, you see ; no need to
explain it more.

THE OLD CHURCH.

THE paths that wound are straight and strange ;
The straggling hedge is trim and low ;
Felled the quaint thorns which used to change
Their winter flush for summer snow.
By mossy mounds, long lost to fame,
The smart young stone its sculpture rears ;
But no new trees the dark yew shame,
And still the old porch its ivy wears.

'Twas through this porch passed long ago
My tiny face from lace hood peeping :
O ancient nurse, who pinched me so
Lest I should sleep, how sound you're sleeping !
Dear grim old font, how well it wears !
What unborn babes shall wail around it ;
Love, hope, and doubt ; have done with tears,
And doubts, and leave it as they found it !

Here in our roomy pew (this slice
They've cut so thin I scarce can push in)
Our little feet made pigeon-pies,
Or dangled from the green-baize cushion ;
We stood on tiptoe to adore
The beauty we were then adoring,
Or smiled to hear young Stubbins snore
Where now his older son is snoring.

Here, I was told, long ages past,
Ere yonder yew first took the snow in,
A great apostle stood and cast
A precious seed which still is growing :
Here burning words of old might sting
Some heart which nursed each antique passion
'Gainst which our modern preachers string
Their harps in such decorous fashion.

Old church, I greet thee once again ;
And thee, pale priest so thin and yellow,
Whose cheeks, whose crazy shins must pain
The ghost of many a better fellow.
Are all those stout-legged parsons gone,
And gaiters which so well became them ?
Long frocks the meagre moderns don
To hide their shanks : and who can blame them

Here in the drowsy afternoon
Perpetual curate's tuneless droning
Was changed by slumber's blissful boon
To sounds of ocean's distant moaning.
Here first my panting bosom felt
Mysterious throbs, long since grown calmer ;
'Twas such a foolish boy who knelt
And begged of Heaven to shield his charmer.

Who charmed me then let memory tell,
Held half my hymn-book, all my fancy ?
A doctor's daughter wove the spell ;
And yonder sits my darling Nancy :

Time, as he stole each maiden grace,
Proved the dear witch was all I thought her.
One near her has the old-time face,
The daughter of the doctor's daughter.

But, O three-decker, where are you ?
The preacher from your giddy height
Could slumbering curate midway view,
Beneath the clerk's pate bald and bright ;
Or gaze like Damocles aloft,
Where, from its chain in need of mending,
Swung the old sounding-board : how oft
We used to fancy it descending !

Old sin-worn roof, how many prayers
Your ready chinks have upward passed !
How many thousand burdening cares
Of weary men on Heaven you've cast !
The shoemaker's remorseful throes,
The soul-touched grocer's promise rasher,
The penitence that weekly rose
From publican and haberdasher.

And could I still, as oft before
I was on many a happy Sunday,
Be here the little child once more
I may have ceased to be on Monday,
And shed my troubles when I come
To this dear porch, I would not sorrow
No glimpse of the millennium
Forbade me take them up to-morrow.

Passion at least outside must wait,
And pride awhile his reign forego :
When I repass the sacred gate
Haply their slave they may not know ;
Or should they know may not regain
The allegiance lost, and one day see
'Twere wise to break the oft-loosened chain,
And set their tiresome captive free.

AT A CONFIRMATION.

WHITE-CAPPED the expectant maidens sit
With downcast eyes and folded hands.
O'er each plain face bright glances flit ;
So sunbeams gladden barren lands.

So once o'er Mary's chosen head
The spirit hovered. Can it be
Once lived a holy man who said
Such words, and brought such hopes to me ?

Yes, thrilled a voice that's silent now,
Yes, hands long stilled in blessing lay,
Through the moved heart now calmed and slow,
On thick brown locks now thinned and gray.

And still it moves me as before
Though not to me the words are said,
And still they bless me as of yore
Though placed upon another's head.

They tell the old power to feel is here ;
Hopes are not lost we can regain,
Nor dead resolves that reappear
And come to be confirmed again.

Who drinks from youth's perennial fount
Of thoughts time's drought can not destroy,
No matter what the years he count—
Methusaleh were yet a boy.

THE VILLAGE ORGANIST.

"I SURPLICE decked, and clean of face and thought,
Though you may see some likeness—so you smile—
Am *not* that Johnson whom you yesterday
Saw putty-daubed upon the ladder's top,
And smeared with much-adulterated paint,
But quite another waiting for the choir,
And while the blower's faithful am content,
And have my life for two hours in each week,
The life I should have loved—and yet who knows.

Behold the choir advancing two by two ;
The postman with the butcher, and the man
Who kills the pigs his farmer comrade breeds.
That spoony Brown with harumscarum Jones
Clothed decently in quite another mind,
His right one I scarce hope ; and, last not least,
The Rector, holding out a yard before
His portly self, the sacred mortar-board
I never saw him wear, and placed thereon
The fuzzy lucubration of the week,
For which he'll shunt the Litany I love.

Come let us sing unto the Lord. I feel
Something unearthly boiling in my breast,
And oozing from my finger-tips. Alas !
We praise Thee, Lord, the best poor way we know,
Hymn Thee with all we have of tuneful lore,

Rise up on angels' wings to-day, to sink
To-morrow to the pigs again—the sty
Where Thou hast placed us without power to soar,
Save this day only for a little space.

Too soon the last hymn dies in its Amen.
Now the glib parson drives my goodness out,
And wanders hopeful in the hopeless maze
Of Abraham's bosom, where he lives to explain
The inexplorable, while I grow old.

Now on our feet—for merciful he stops
Just at the forty minutes—and once more,
For the last time till six long days are passed,
I rouse myself from sleep, do what I can,
Not what I would, nor what I could have done—
Or so I think,—had but the Rector spared
His poppy-loaded 'thirdly.' ”

And so home ;

Where, entering at the side-door carelessly,
He runs against a pail of paint new mixed
For the squire's house to-morrow ; which upset
On his best coat his temper too upsets,
Brings out a Monday oath, and breaks his shins,
And breaks the sacred tenor of his dream.

OUT OF TOWN.

WHEN suns are hot, and struggle through
My dingy pane's accustomed brown,
When every sky save this is blue,
And all the world is out of town,
I too am of it ; for my soul
At least can follow fancy's bent,
And hasten to its oft-sought goal,
" A little village down in Kent."

I go to it by coach : all day
By town, by hill, by dale, we race ;
The guard's key-bugle cheers our way,
His coat no ruddier than his face.
The distance comes, is seen, is passed,
No half-snatched glimpse through smoke and steam ;
And yet we seem to fly too fast
Through such a land, with such a team.

As evening falls we reach the place,
Last spot to Cockneys quite unknown ;
No railroads ancient ways deface,
Or bring one bagman out of town.
The age of gold has not yet set,
So far behind this age we lag
Where thrive the golden farmers yet,
And wheat's worth Lord knows what a bag.

The golden farmers! for their stock
No sea-borne murrain sweeps away,
Nor constant rains destroy the flock
Whose wholesome lambs by kind ewes play.
No grain-filled ships through storm and blast
Wild seas undeviating stem,
Or million herds on prairies vast
Breed, feed, and die to ruin them.

Here stretch the yellow cornfields wide,
Blue smoke from each white homestead curls,
Sheep dot the sloping valley side,
And on each hill its windmill whirls :
There bounding billows curve and fret,
Suns rise upon a thousand sail
Which wait, not independent yet,
The coming of the wished-for gale.

The old church-tower stands straight and square,
Built of smooth flints from off the shore ;
The aisles are cold and damp and bare,
Where close-penned farmers weekly snore ;
The beadle fiddles to the choir,
Candles nor cross the altar crown,
The old clerk mauls his sacred lore,
The parson preaches in black gown.

Two battered patched machines invite
To pleasing death the bather keen ;
Gray sailors loiter round, whose might
Once launched the old boats 'gainst which they lean ;

The salt-sea smell is all about,
And tarry nets hang everywhere ;
Day marks no smiling brow with thought,
Night brings no haunting dream of care.

" Rest, rest with us ;" the cool waves' play
Scarce moves the lazy shingle round ;
" Rest, rest with us," land breezes say,
And scarce the cornfields catch the sound.
Dread storms must oft those valleys sweep,
And winds must stir that peaceful sea ;
Yet still those waves but rock my sleep,
And still those storms bring calm to me.

But genius (!) loathed the honest street,
And pined upon the breezy down ;
I shook the dust from eager feet,
And left the country for the town.
Back to old scenes should wanderers roam,
Their disappointed spirits find
Sad changes in the ancient home
Which they reseek with altered mind.

So I awake. Each dusty pane
More dusty for my dream appears ;
And is it fancy tries in vain
Erase the toiling weary years ?
Her for the future we invoke,—
Fair were the towers she used to raise ;—
But here a sleeping memory woke
Of innocent and happy days.

When hopes are lost, or gained and passed,
And each fresh bud 's a withered rose,
Beneath the shade your yew-trees cast
This worn-out truant may repose.
Then should some friend my heart lay bare
When deaf to praise and dead to blame,
He'd find the record graven there,
Dear village, of your humble name.

“ Four corners to my bed,
Four angels at my head.”

THE old old house unaltered stands, each stone of it
I know,
And the ancient threshold where I tripped in the days
of long ago.

Stooping I tread the narrow way, and climb the wind-
ing stair,

And I see once more the little bed, but the angels are
not there.

O four remembered corners dear which once four
angels kept,

From whence in health I rose so oft, where tired in
peace I slept,

Where a little child was by himself yet never lay alone,
Angels four to guard his rest—and now where are
they gone ?

Some anxious looks I know they cast, oft held a
warning finger.

Could a little child so fright them that with him they
dared not linger ?

Flew they to keep unchallenged ward afar from sin
and woe ?

But sentinels unneeded watch where there can come
no foe.

Alas! impatient spirits false, you might have known,
I think,
That to th' old stream at set of sun the hart would
turn to drink.
Are sinless souls so many then, or angels got so few,
That mine to win you could not watch for one short
hour or two?

THE SATCHEL.

THE satchel on its ancient hook,
The dusty little cap above it ;
Whereon we've not the heart to look,
Wherefrom we've not the heart to move it.
What springs have into winters grown,
What spring-time hearts has age turned colder,
Since the dear fellow took it down
And strapped it on his little shoulder ?

He had the very sweetest face—
Or so we deemed—that boy had ever ;
His childish thoughts we could not trace,
So called him "anything but clever."
For days and weeks, and weeks and days,
We roamed about the first declension.
The torture filled him with amaze ;
He fancied it my own invention.

We never got to "amo," yet
How fondly he could love his mother ;
Each homeless dog he'd make his pet,
And feel for him as for a brother.
The closest fellowship he'd own
With all the outcasts of creation,
And for a wounded bird would groan
As if it were his near relation.

I told him simple things—which made
His blue eyes stare with trustful wonder—
Of earth, sea, heaven. I'm since afraid
He's found out many a senseless blunder.
From learning's shelf with wrinkled brow
What lore on tiptoe I would reach him !
Is the dear fellow thinking now
What useless stuff I used to teach him ?

I wish he'd send—'twould be but fair—
A programme of his work up yonder,
Name those his house and play who share,
And tell whose love than ours is fonder.
Persuade—Oh ! such persuader must,
When prophets fail and preachers vain—
Each weary heart once more to trust,
And take its way to school again.

How gladly, darling, could I learn
The thousandth part of half your knowledge,
I'd take your satchel in my turn,
And toddle off again to college ;
Lend my bent back to harmless cane,
Wear foolscap which these locks would match ill.
Though some might say—— But 'tis in vain.
Hang undisturbed, dear tiny satchel.

THE BELL.*

IT rang from the roof of my father's house in the days
when we were young,
Where around our home to their chestnut poles the
teeming hop-vines clung.
Vast oak trees budded around in spring, dry leaves in
the autumn fell,
And hours into days and youth to age were turned by
the dear old bell.

Gold and silver and brass were mixed to give it a
mellow tone,
And scarce a bell in the country-side with ours could
hold its own.
When across our fields the chimes rang out from the
old cathedral towers,
We heard them peal in the distance dim, and thought
that they answered ours.

It saw old men to their last home borne, and many an
ancient dame,
And children nipped in their early spring, but it still
rang on the same. —

* Removed from Heppington, Kent ; now at Cassington, Oxford.

How many a sunbeam on it glanced, how many a
shadow fell !

But if in its tones a change there seemed, 'twas in us
and not the bell.

We wandered away from the ancient home, and I took
the bell with me,

And I fitted it newly, and bid it strike, and it strikes
me a memory.

No curfew now to the ploughman's toil, no more
through the woods 'tis heard,

But rings through passages new and strange the note
of a prisoned bird.

Yet constant still the old bell rings out as in the
ancient place,

So bravely rings, who would not shame to show a
peevish face ?

And I foolishly wonder—I love it so—when I shall be
underground

Will it summon the guests I shall not know with a
gayer or sadder sound ?

When babes were born and hearts rejoiced it seemed
our joy to know,

To saddened souls its note tolled sad with their own
note of woe.

'Twas feeling altered changeless chimes ; no matter
where we fly

A dull or merry heart rings out, and makes or mars
our sky.

And the bell's but a thing we make ourselves that
outlasts its maker long,
Like the house we build, or the tree we plant, or even
a simple song.
An ill deed tolls when the actor's gone with a sad and
eternal knell,
And a good deed long to our children speaks with the
sound of a wedding bell.

THE HILL FARM.

AS sunbeams bright with their silver light on fresh-
turned furrows play

She came to the farm behind the hill on a dull
December day.

She came all charming, as angels ought, from a world
I did not know ;

Then back she flew to the world she knew, and I went
back to my plough.

Oh, dark, dark hills, which were once so bright ! Oh,
heart which was once so gay !

Oh, face which should never have blessed my sight, or
never have gone away !

And oh, to be foolish as once I was, or blithe as my
mates are still !

And oh, to see nothing on earth so good as the farm
behind the hill !

For once 'twas good to rise at dawn, my prayer with
the lark's upthrown,

And to lay me at night on my humble bed, tired and
contented, down ;

Or bashful toast in a modest glass the belle of the
country-side,
Ere I ever had dreamed there was one like her in all
the world so wide.

Now gone is my bliss of dull content which once
sufficed my lot.

Why further pride in an honest hand since she would
clasp it not?

What now to me is a tenfold yield piled high on the
old barn floor?

Ho! Rover dog, I could whistle once as I never shall
whistle more.

Old Captain, Buxom, and Dobbin, too, you are sense-
less beasts at best;

Full many a night I'd lie awake, but it never spoilt
your rest;

Full oft by day with a heavy heart, and no responsive
sigh,

I've let you stand in the half-ploughed land—but did
you wonder why?

Who shall woo her at times, I guess, shall call her his
own, his dear,

And gaze in her eyes for his destiny—but I never
could bear to hear.

'Tis not that to curse him I'd be fain, for blessing is
more my way.

Oh, cherish her fondly whom I may not, and be good to
her who may!

But however it's ruled this world of ours, with its
mixture of loss and gain,
Where some with toil must plough the soil that others
may reap the grain,
For her be the light of the sunrise bright wherever her
footsteps stray,
For me the shade which the sunset made on the night
she went away.

THE OLD PLOUGHMAN.

YES, master, rheumatics is bad, so I thought I was
best at home.

Lor's ! how the rain comes down ! but the missus she
fancied you'd come.

I'm glad that I landed the "ten acres" up before I
gin out,

Or it wouldn't have dried before April with all this
water about.

Now you can sow it come a fine week, and I hope it
will yield ;

Twenty-six years I've ploughed it, and oh ! it's a
deuce of a field.

That steamer was never no good, and I wished it was
broken to bits ;

Coal and water all day, and it worried me out of my
wits.

But steady's the way to get on with your work, as
I've always found.

Furrow by furrow, land by land, gets over the ground.

What does we do sitting here all day the missus and
me ?

Gets up and potters about in the dawn, and to bed
after tea.

Talking ! We've nothing to talk of ; I never was used
to prate ;
Sits with our hands on our knees, and blinks half
asleep at the grate.

Thinking ! We never minds thinking. Thinking's
a poor sort of game—
Thinking of what we must come to now that we're old
and lame,
With never a sixpence saved to keep us from going
down hill,
While some as done never a stroke are eating and
drinking their fill.
I never could do with no thinking, except about horses
and such,
And wishing's the same sort of folly ; and none of 'em
troubles us much.

What could we wish for, you see, at least that we're
likely to get ?
Not all the wishing in heaven could keep out the cold
and the wet ;
Not all the wishing on earth could change a gray horse
to a brown,
Bring me a new pair of legs, or find the old dame a
new gown.
You had ought to have got me a new pair of legs when
you bought the new plough ;
If I only could tell where to get 'em I think I'd have
knowledge enow.

Should I have ploughed any better for learning to
write and to read

As they teaches 'em up at the Board School? They
makes fine ploughboys indeed!

That Tommy of ours with his schooling! I doubt
that they spared him the birch;

Can't keep a team in the furrow, for all that he sings
in the church.

'Twasn't the fashion when I was a lad, but they
changes about:

Years since my smock was the fashion, and I and my
smock are worn out.

The scores of Novembers I've seen, yet never knowed
one so bad.

Seasons ain't half what they used to be when I was a
lad.

Yet somehow whatever the season the wheat's almost
always got;

God-amighty don't send us His blessings for stupids to
leave 'em to rot.

He don't make it always summer, He won't let it
always snow:

Some sort of weather I'll have, please God, wheresum-
ever I go.

THE PARISH DOCTOR.

BEHOLD me, wife, and better late than never,
Wet to the skin, hungry, and sulky, too.
The old mare cast a shoe, no blacksmith's shop
Within a league ; I walked her six miles home.
How pleasant looks the fire, how bright your face,
After the last hour spent in groping for
Gates with my whip. No foot I'll stir to-night
Let who may send. I want an evening's rest ;
I want to read that—— What's the matter now ?
Old Tibbats' folk have sent to say he's dying ?
Quick, Harry, saddle the old mare again.
Give her some gruel first. Though how the deuce
To ride her with three shoes ? The poor old chap
Has had a hardish time (Order me quick
A crust and tankard !), toiling all his days
At ploughing money in and reaping twitch,
Which men call " farming " in this fruitful land.
How cross he used to be, how hard it was
To get a penny out of him ! And yet
A stout heart beat beneath that rugged breast,
Or he'd have rested from his cares before.
I wonder if he has the least idea
Of where he's going, or cares at all to know.
He's had but little time to think with all
His grubbing, and he got no help from me.

This ale ! From Blossom ? Blossom sent it in
To pay his bill. If no more strength had been
In what I sent him than is in this ale
He had gone where Tom is going. Ale, indeed !

This dying's the one draught all patients take ;
No ranging it with others on a shelf
To show the doctor when he boasts about
His physic that you're cured in spite of him—
About as poor a joke as man could play.
I'm getting tired of patching bodies up ;
A sign my own wants patching. Years ago
I used to think myself exempt ; it's time
To study out the matter ; yet I've scarce
A moment I can call my own for thought ;
Asleep before I've crawled into my bed,
And waked before I've time to plan a dream.
They're always being born or the reverse,
And that's what tires me, there's so little new ;
For, knowing each weak point in every limb
For ten miles round, and knowing too the cause
Shall surely strain hereafter brain or limb,
Who sends for me wastes words explaining why.
Joe Smith's fat pony in a lather means
Gout, and that spavined mare of Ashford's tells
Her master's gone too fast, just like his mare ;
I wish I didn't know her quite so well.
Prescriptions gather strength with each attack.
When vets. find blisters useless they're but changed
For firing—legs once fired give up the case.
Then there's a funeral. I ride within
The well-known mourning coach and catch a cold.

Some from a pulpit curse or bless mankind ;
They're saved of course as making their own laws.
Some write fine verses—ah ! that's practical !
I can't stand verse. Old Homer's good enough ;
But oh, the moderns with their jingling rhymes !
Is't want of wit in them or brains in me ?
Some patriotic souls are eloquent
Like parrots for a pudding, some men judge
Mankind, some judge themselves I hope, and some
Do the real work ; and we, when this same work
Has bowled the doers over, set them up
Upon their pins to be bowled down again.
Our sails are always set, towing some craft
Into the harbour whence 'twill put to sea
A.I. again, perhaps ; but sails wear out ;
Had mine been weak they had worn out long ago.
Yet if there's justice in that Heaven above
They won't ignore me when I knock and cry :
"The parish doctor's come to take his rest."
Confound that boy, when will he bring the mare ?
Old Tibbats—'t isn't long I've called him old—
Courtied his wife the year I courted mine.
God bless me ! What an age ago it seems !
My hair was brown then as your eyes are yet.
We're wearing out, my dearest, wearing out,
And who's to set the doctor on his legs ?
Well, well, be sure you don't sit up for me.
Here comes the mare. God bless you, love ! Good-
night.

FARMER BROWN.

LOOK where th' old house stands,
Roof with red tiles blazing,
On the cold clay lands
Where lean cows lack grazing.
Place of which he's grown
Fond, he'd scarce be fonder
Were it Portland stone.
Farmer Brown lives yonder.

See him in his smock,
Nought for weather caring,
Shabby billycock
Rough with th' old cow's hair in.
Scant locks turning gray,
Like the sunset fading
Which he scans to-day,
Eyes with hard hand shading.

Toils from dawn to night
'Midst his wheat and 'tatoes,
Then sleeps soundly quite
As an owl by day does.
Keeps a frugal mind ;
Taxmen, always knocking,
Stare when still they find
Something in his stocking.

FARMER BROWN.

Radicals he hates,
 Why, he's not decided ;
Thinks they raise the rates ;
 Once I fancy I did.
Thinks, perhaps, they're born
 Farming gains to unsettle,
Cheap'ning wheat and horn
 For the men of metal.

Told how farmers quaff
 Fine old port and sherry,
Laughs an acid laugh
 O'er his sober perry.
On no thoroughbred
 Takes his brooks and doubles ;
Shanks's mare instead
 Bears him round his stubbles.

Can't a-bear to pay
 For the nation's learning ;
Girls who sing and play
 Get above their churning.
Thinks beside the plough
 Is the school for ploughboys ;
Says he ought to know
 What to teach his cowboys.

When he can afford
 To the " Bull " to wander,
Drinks like any lord
 What he means to squander.

Tightly holds the wall,
Speaks a little thicker,
Doesn't speak at all,
Carries home his liquor.

In his dialect
Tells a famous story ;
Likes a war, erect
Struts with England's glory.
Votes as he's inclined,
Never fails to stand word ;
Says what he's a mind
When he meets his landlord.

Cruel came the days
Lifelong toil defeating,
Lined the honest face,
Saddened the blithe greeting.
Crops by ceaseless wet
Spoilt ere he could store them ;
Hard the ills he met,
Hard the man who bore them.

Death when he comes near
From his cows to sunder
Sees no glimpse of fear,
Just a little wonder.
"What must be must be,
No more toil and labour.
Can't exactly see——
Well, goodbye, old neighbour."

THE DRIPPING WELL.

THE dripping well ! Oh, when shall I forget it,
Or the slender mountain ash that leant across ?
The tiny thorn that half way rose and met it,
The lichen and the shimmer on the moss ?
My tremor as the cold moon watched our greeting,
And turned the drops to diamonds as they fell,
When first with happy bosom loudly beating
I saw the lovely curséd dripping well.

Some say a baby star begins to glimmer
Coeval with an earth-born baby's cry,
Grows brighter as the child grows strong, and dimmer
To disappear with age's parting sigh.
I care not whether true or false the story,
But well I know 'twas my lost star that fell
From Heaven, and shot from all its pride and glory,
That night when first I saw the dripping well.

O star upon that night which left the others
That twinkle in their frost-lit splendour yet !
Did any of your million happy brothers
Lament the kindred ray for ever set ?
O happy beings safe from my despairing !
Your sister I before from Heaven I fell.
Had Heaven no more for you than me been caring
You too had chanced to hate the dripping well.

THE USHER—OLD STYLE.

HE was thin and pale, but though fate might bend
His form, the spirit it could not quell.
His dress was shabby, for bankers lend
No money to those who need it. Well!
He told more riches than they could tell.

He'd a mother in luxury whom he kept
On just ten shillings a week in gold.
He'd a brother for whom his weak eyes wept,
Wishing that he was under the mould ;
And a love—but his love was never told.

From his sordid couch from dreams he'd rise
Of feasts on Olympus which he would share.
Not all he wants to whom fate denies
The vulgar viands for which we care.
The food that he had he did not spare.

If bread and cheese his meal might lack,
He had ever at hand a drink divine—
Poor crumb of bread to a sea of sack.
Called it Castalia ; there were nine
Ladies who flew to share his wine,

As he walked to his daily labour dull
The foul streets might have been gold for him.
His purse was empty, his heart was full ;
His hopes were bright though his eye was dim,
And light heart triumphed o'er weary limb.

We teased him, the wretched crew we were,
With thoughtless gibing which would have torn
A heart unused to the fruitless sneer
Which struck no spark of disgust or scorn ;
For he set not his breast against a thorn.

And he loved, if not for the raven's sake,
Each little raven that brought him bread,
While he sat in his desert, and saw earth wake
To a day which should shower down honours, instead
Of insults, on an ennobled head.

He never despaired for a moment, nor
Thought any end but the best would come,
But that highest place he was eager for,
" His name on the back of a world-read tome."
Instead came a message called him home.

One morn when the sun was bright in the East
We heard this crawler from earth had soared,
Leaving to me, who had laughed the least
At his ways, his manuscripts underscored,
To make me famous and him deplored.

Poor drudge ! great king, I would rather say ;
Half-starved, yet feasting on regal fare ;
No more shall headmaster cross your way,
Save one who shall for his usher care
With a shining robe for the black threadbare.

If a simple heart from falsehood free,
If a soul which never a mean thought knew,
Could have kept him on earth, he were still with me ; ;
But such are required in heaven too,
And are sooner taken because so few.

And I am not famous, nor is he wept
In this, if loved on another strand ;
Yet he was happy, and I have kept
These reams that I never could understand.
He may construe them in a better land.

"THE SPANIARDS."

"Hinc exaudiri gemitus et sæva sonare
Verbera." VIRG., *Æn.* VI.

I WRITE not of historic Spain,
Her glories or her Inquisition,
Nor from th' Armada's threatenings vain
Would point my moral at ambition ;
Nor of Don Quixote and his squire,
His palaces and mills and tanyards ;
Another day let these inspire.—
I'm thinking now of other Spaniards.

They live not many miles from where
Out of his mist St. Paul's arises.
(A shining dot high up in air
His ball the countryman surprises.)
No more to vex you, they're an inn
Which thrives on sales of ale and porter,
Fine wines—home-made—and watered gin
For those poor men who can't drink water.

'Twas here I bought my first cigar—
A cabbage or I'm much mistaken ;
Almost the dire aroma—bah !
Held flavour of suggested bacon.

'Twas Warlike brought it. Warlike? stop!
An ancient Irish costermonger
Whose cherries, cocoanuts, and pop
Were excellent when we were younger.

I smoked it by that ancient tree
Now guarded by a brand-new railing;
Old Warlike held his sides to see
How awfully I was regaling.
Dear Spaniards! gladly I'd consume,
Were youth on those false wreaths attending,
Your dubious stock, though now 'twould doom
To fiercer throes and direr rending.

A mile away there was a school
—And this is all my little mystery—
A master there who youths could rule
As few since Squeers' pathetic history.
His sinewy arm, and cruel frown,
His ear stone-deaf to prayers and screeches,
Took many a youthful spirit down,
And half a million pairs of breeches.

I was a wicked lad I know,
Because on every blessed Monday
Through that glass door I had to go:
Knowledge which brought no bliss to Sunday.
I broke Ball's nose in artless play,
The size of it was quite appalling;
To cap my crimes I smoked one day
The smoke that I am now recalling.

But good, indifferent, or bad
 The dear kind man seemed quite to like me ;
 I was so very fat a lad
 It was a sort of joy to strike me.
 With horse-hair we would split the cane ;
 We hid the birch ; it didn't matter.
 Rubbed lemons on our hands—in vain.
 I should have died had I been fatter.

What grand new cricket ground is here ?
 Our old one was confined and bumpy.
 Where's the big oak we climbed ? Oh, dear !
 I never thought it was so stumpy.
 And you, my mates, who seemed to me
 Secure of lawn, already ermined,
 Have you too dwindled like yon tree ?
 You scarce are all our hopes determined.

And what of you by deep design
 Whose name is missed from this recital ?
 A something whispers, “ Master mine,
 Those cruel blows have had requital.”
 You must have had some aches and smarts,
 Some twinges, did you care to track them,
 For scores and scores of little hearts,
 All lost when you no more could whack them.

I passed you rather on the wane ;
 Time gives to you who gave no quarter.
 You live divorced from birch and cane ;
 'Twas not your eye which used to water.

Your face so dire and fateful once
Wears now a harmless senile simper.
'Twas strange to think how when a dunce.
You used to make me dance and whimper.

But what of that? youth's sun (long dead
Of petty troubles and vexations)
Gilded those groves of birch, and shed
Its light o'er all the cane plantations.
Pitch it away, it's almost out,
Old times its smoke-wreaths seemed to summon.
And pray what was this all about?
My first cigar upon the common.

THE MOWER.

RISE, mower, rise ; the last star dies,
Pink morning tints, instead, the skies.

Brush through the glade, and keen invade
The meadow with your new-whet blade :

Your honest pride with strength well plied
To leave a clean-cut swath and wide.

Lay the field low, long stroke and slow ;
But few of us could labour so.

Your rest well won at noon-day sun,
Which tells that half your day's work 's done.

Ends the long day, now go your way,
Tired but content with hard-earned pay.

Foul weather, fair, your labour there
May mar or make ; why need you care ?

The toil was yours ; the storm-cloud lowers,
To-morrow and the care is ours :

Scheming in vain through wind and rain,
Until at last we load the wain.

Ceasing to mow you'd soon avow
"Better bent back than furrowed brow."

Seek not to share the marks we bear—
The wistful eyes and the bleached hair.

For though calm days heroic lays
Extol not, you shall have your praise.

Who mows his span the best he can
Can do no more for God or man.

HER SPRING.

WHEN snow in snowdrops passed away,
And soft winds prophesied of May,
And buds of promise gemmed each bough,
And hope, fond hope, went forth to sow,
And young birds spread the eager wing,
She had her spring.

Hoard—since yourself may need—the tear ;
She had the freshness of the year :
Hers the white orchard's promise fair,
Ours a ripe apple here and there ;
But much lies strewn she thought would cling.
She had her spring.

Some stay but till the swallows come,
Others to bear the harvest home.
Sweet the full notes birds pipe in May.
Not all who face the wintry day
Shall hear starved robin suppliant sing.
She had her spring.

THE AUTUMN CROCUS.

It answered not to the voice of spring,
Nor peeped to welcome the cuckoo's wing.
It blanched not pale with the whitening thorn,
Nor blushed with poppies in autumn corn.
But it came with the coming of winter chill,
And mist laid heavy upon the hill.
"No more winter," I said, and lo !
It passed and left me before the snow.

Oh, had it come with the birds in spring
It might have passed on the swallow's wing.
Love that with spring's first shoots is born
Is fitly garnered among the corn.
But to come with the passing of autumn chill,
And fly ere winter had fled the hill !
Be born with Indian summer's glow,
And then lie buried beneath the snow !

THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

I DID not wander o'er ocean far,
Or foreign lands to behold my star ;
But I stayed at home, and I saw her pass,
And I wish she had been but a homely lass.

I did not examine the skies by night :
Enough that I knew she took her flight.
If I had but gazed at the star-lit sky !
But I looked on the earth when she went by.

It was but a flash from her beauty rare,
It was but a scent of her flowing hair,
It was but a moment, a year, no more ;
It is but a life when all is o'er.

And you your star who are seeking now,
May cool warm hearts in her bosom's snow,
May meet the shafts from her soft eyes thrown,
And wish you had turned away your own.

For whom once she passes she has forgot,
And who sees her pass can forget her not ;
He may gaze on earth, he may search the sky,
But never again will she pass him by.

THE VIOLETS.

SNOW in the air, and snow on the fields, and snow,
cold snow on the hill.

Calmly the lilies are sleeping yet, and the violets
sleeping still.

Time ye were waked, 'tis time ye were stirred, we wait
your promise of May,

And the modest sheen of your purple and green
thrusting the snow away.

Yet shall the violets wake I know, and earth shall be
glad once more ;

But oh, for a spring to revisit the souls whose spring-
time once is o'er.

Never a flower or a bud for them, but only a wintry
glow ;

But only to sit with hopeless eyes and gaze in vain at
the snow.

Violets nursed by spring's soft hand, then fall'n by a
despot's sway !

Not of themselves did the violets die ; souls of them-
selves decay.

Sweetly the violets lived their lives, contented in sun
and in rain.

Who helpless were made to blossom and fade sweetly
shall blossom again.

Since not your winter yourselves ye brought, violets !
rightly ye wake.

Right too, alas ! that souls should sleep, souls which
their winter make.

So violets gay may laugh at decay with many a spring-
time in store.

So keep your spring while ye may, ye souls ! once
passed, it shall come no more.

FOLDED.

FOLDED upon her bosom true
The still hands lie, which lately moved
So busily for all she loved,
Which moved so busily for you.

Cold the quick feet which to and fro
Went at your wish ; God grant your own
Through long disuse not useless grown.
How if her zeal but wrought your woe ?

Some rust undrawn from day to day
Through long dull years which have no story :
Better the brief flash of your glory—
Brave sword soon broken in the fray.

BEAN-BLOSSOMS.

WHERE grass grows short and the meadows end,
And hedged fields slowly the hill ascend,
To the gentle breezes bending low,
Lazily bending, the bean-flowers blow.

In winter the steaming horses toil
With the bright plough deep in the loamy soil ;
In spring the sower goes forth to sow :
Sweet in the summer the bean-flowers blow.

Thither the bee with his ceaseless hum,
Thither the maids with their lovers come.
Pity that beauty cannot last !
Pity the blossoms fade so fast !

Oh, sweet the scent of the garden-rose ;
As sweet on the hill the bean-flower blows.
The bean to the threshing-floor shall come,
But the rose is not at the harvest home.

Maiden, what do the bean-flowers say ?
"Beauty but lasts for a little day.
Who learns the lesson our blossoms tell
May be sweet and lovely and good as well."

THE JACKDAWS.

How often long ago
Lying wearied out with play,
Have I watched the jackdaws wheeling
Round the old cathedral gray ;
So content to croak and fly
'Neath a blue or cloudy sky ;
And I thought them dull and ancient,
For my life was in its May.

Now again I lie beneath
Looking up into the sky ;
Still the grass is green around me,
Still above the jackdaws fly ;
And behold they are not changed
By all storms which since have ranged,
And I think " O happy jackdaws !
You are younger now than I."

Your secret, youthful jackdaws ?
All too late I guess the why ;
" Be content with any weather,
Sailing calm beneath God's sky :
If no hero, then no scars :
If a cage, don't beat the bars ;
Wishing not for eagle's pinion,
And not blind without his eye."

THE POET'S CORNER.

WHEN toils are over and labours cease,
And life and love nor vex nor please,
Where shall the poet's rest be found
Whose living brows no laurel crowned ?
Genius 'neath marble tomb may rest,
Art pile her grief on valour's breast ;
And funeral anthems herald fame :
A softer requiem I'd claim.

Can pompous monumental urn
Bid triumphs linger, hopes return,
Warm clay-cold hearts at passion's glow
Or bend once more the broken bow ?
Death in the Abbey death must be,
Dust is but dust beneath the tree ;
He who's forgot is dead indeed,
Who still is loved no fame will need.

And who dare say I may not know
A little pang, a tiny glow,
Some touch, though slight, of love which shall
The sweet familiar pain recall,
When to your bosom I repair
And find my Poet's Corner there,
Live in its loving fall and rise,
And shine immortal in your eyes ?

EVANDER AND PALLAS.

ALONE, dear son, thou should'st not go to death or
victory
If but the gods would give me back the precious years
gone by,
Make strong these arms as once they were, unbleach
these locks of snow,
Cure the dire ills by their decree which age must
undergo.
And yet may they who never bent beneath the weight
of years
Take pity on a poor old king, and list a father's
prayers.

Son, if the gods will bring thee back once more to my
embrace,
And grant to look with failing eyes once more upon
thy face,
I pray for life ; content with that to bear what ills
they give,
So they permit this worn-out frame to suffer and yet
live.
For short of death there's not in life extremity of
pain
I would not welcome, certain so to welcome thee
again.

But if the gods have fixed thy fate no more to
 brighten mine,
May kindly death these old eyes close before he
 darkens thine ;
While feebly hopes assail the doubts they cannot
 overthrow,
Ere doubts confirmed shall turn those hopes to
 certainty of woe,
'Twere best life ceased while to this breast thy living
 form I strain,
With arms not destined, it may be, to clasp a son
 again.

THE PROOF.

REST, calmly rest, my love,
While rest you may, she said.
Smile, dearest, in thy sleep, and I the watch will keep,
And sit beside thy head.

Yet lightly sleep, my love,
While I thine arms prepare ;
For the lake a ripple stirs, and a false hand parts the
firs ;
So sleeping be well ware.

One day has another told.
Night night has certified.
But to-morrow I shall live the kiss of love to give,
Or you for me have died.

You promised well, my love,
Ere sorrow came us nigh,
That when the need should be you would fight for
home and me.
Now you must do or die.

Rest calm, but lightly sleep ;
The last sleep it may be.
By the warding of the blow, by the smiting of the foe,
Shall I judge, my own, of thee.

REMORSE.

IN dreams last night I visited
The awful shores where mortals dead,
Who somehow failed on earth to win
Their pardon, expiate their sin.
Strange punishments my sleeping thought
From long-forgotten studies brought ;
But while the classic horrors grew,
One punishment I saw was new.

Not all unhappy seemed the ghosts
Who kept those visionary coasts.
Mercy decreed that they should foil
Their misery with ceaseless toil.
And toil induced by harsh excess
The languor of forgetfulness,
Let hopes of expiation in,
And modified the sense of sin.

But one I marked who walked alone
And rolled no rough returning stone,
Yet seemed from idleness to gain
Less ease than they from labours vain.
I asked his punishment, and he
Faltered "Remorse!" though what might be
The crime which marked him from the host,
And shunned by every blood-stained ghost,
I did not ask nor did he tell.
I knew his punishment was Hell.

THE IMPOSSIBLE.

DEAR chance, whose skirts in sunlight shine,
Can aught avail to make you mine?
Dear flying skirts! I scarcely know
If to attempt or let you go.

"Oh, fool to doubt," some victor cries,
"He loses all who doubts or flies.
Th' impossible is never won,
Because 'tis possible when done."

Pygmalion-like the lover sighs ;
Cold marble blushes 'neath his eyes.
Hope tints the senseless bosom's snow
With something of a human glow.

And who can say what may not be
Who studies hearts or history?
Since kings of peasant stock have been,
Or stooped to raise a peasant queen.

And many a man had he but known
He stood so near the wished-for throne
Had struggled on for one more day
Before he cast his crown away.

Hope on then while we live and breathe,
Are on the earth and not beneath.
Th' impossible is when we die.
They are not dead who hope and sigh.

REFUSE ME.

REFUSE me, love, and bid me go
To enjoy my necessary woe.
For very shame your whispered "yes"
Would thrust me back on happiness.

(With common folk who have no cares,
No lamentations, and no prayers ;
No unkind mistress or untrue
That they need write a sonnet to.)

'Tis madness—you and some may think—
Profess such thirst and then not drink ;
With such a fiery longing crave
What I so want, yet would not have.

But trust me—elsewhere though I err—
In this a true philosopher ;
'Tis Heaven as long as we desire,
A lower place when we acquire.

And every hero's fame begins
From what he wants, not what he wins.
And hunger 'tis, not fulness, moves
Mankind to deeds mankind approves.

But sweet, misjudge me not, nor say
This tragedy of mine was play.
'Tis in my nature, which was meant
To find its bliss in discontent.

Let kindness then your warm heart steel
To stretch no finger when I kneel.
I would but be refused again,
And so renew the pleasing pain.

But not too oft. One day you'll raise
Yours to my melancholy gaze,
And seeing all my love for you
Just feel a little for me too.

Then wert thou won my fate would see
Trouble in happiness with thee.
Averted eyes would on me shine,
And dim those kinder eyes of thine.

THE TRULY VIRTUOUS.

COME, O friends inglorious !
Let's exalt our petty days,
Praise ourselves whom none else praise,
Laud the truly virtuous.

Come, rejoice with Lazarus,
Thankful for the gulf that's fixed
Ofttimes sin and us betwixt,
By compulsion virtuous.

Love, how fatal to a king !
Syren with her scented hair,
Wavy form, and magic air,
Never song for us will sing.

For ambition did we sigh,
Could our pique proclaim a war ?
Hurry unskilled peasants far
For an unknown field to die ?

Cruelty let rich men plan ;
Meanest bird we dare not scorn
Which protects or steals our corn ;
Weakest horse may save a man.

Rage and fury us forsake ;
Power may scheme what foe to harm ;
Needs the little shop or farm
Must for bailiff temper take.

Peevish cares which money brings,
Plaguy worry, finger ache,
Which high-seasoned riches make,
Our plain crust leaves no such stings.

Strength in weakness we espy,
Pushing through the narrow gate
Riches can but make more strait,
Squeezing through the needle's eye.

Poverty's our wealth ; let us,
Since scant blessings we have got,
Thank the giver for our lot,
By ill-fortune virtuous.

ON A PIKE FOUND DEAD IN
OUR POOL.

BROTHER, the big pike 's dead !

Yes, for I've seen him lie
Calm, curled up by the reeds at the head
Of the pool, with glazing eye.
The once terrible mouth gaped harmless wide,
The old belly gleamed white and fat.
How many fish like us must have died
To make a fish like that ?

How did he die ? Who knows ?

Choked by a perch, some say ;
Some fatherless perch driven mad with the woes
Of a grudge he determined to pay.
And the poor little fish need not struggle in vain,
Though pikes be never so strong ;
For he ever will find a weak link in his chain
Who is set to avenge a wrong.

Lord of our lives was he ?

Seised by his tyrant's law
Of the awful right to quench liberty's light,
And to gather us into his maw.

To drive us in fear from our river homes dear,
To harass by night and by day,
And to bring them low with hopeless woe
God meant to be so gay.

Comrades, rejoice and frisk—
Ye upon whom he's not fed—
Let each fin give a twist, and each tail a glad whisk,
The big pike who eat us is dead.
'Tis something to know he can harm us no more,
For a moment it soothes our distress,
Though fate has fresh troubles we doubt not in store,
And only a pike the less.

But, see! the rushes are moved;
Comrades, another pike!
Were he fatter he might be the friend we so loved;
He's certainly awfully like.
Our poor little fish, how 'twill trouble his ghost
To learn his brave death was in vain!
A lean master instead of the fat one we've lost—
It's little enough we shall gain.

BROTHER TOM.

WHAT ! Income tax writing again ? If not, I can't
guess who it's from ;

"H.M.S. !" I wonder can something have happened
to Tom ?

Years since we had any tidings ; I thought we were
clean forgot :

Tom never took no notice, and we never troubled
a lot.

Yes ; all's over with Tom, and just as I knew it 'ud be ;
Killed at some foreign place, fighting for you and me.
Stiff with his face to the stars seems as I see him lie,
Shot through his honest heart—poor Tom, who'd
never say die.

'Twas always the way with Tom to do what he
needn't do ;

Helping some poor little chap ; beaten to black and
blue ;

Talking of honour and such. Honour, I take it, is
stuff.

Now he knows what it is ; he's got honour enough.

He died game, you bet : you couldn't make him afraid.
'Tis lucky there's some as'll fight for us as is fond of
trade.

Tom wouldn't never have none of it ; trade was a
humbug, he said ;
Called me a Brummagem bagman—Lord ! and now
he's dead.

Tom was a venturesome chap, just one of the old-
fashioned sort
They'd used to have ages ago, and he'd ought to have
lived then, he ought.
He'd have gone down to the beach to meet them
Romans in mail,
Called to his gods—such gods !—and gone at 'em
tooth and nail.

Who filled the cartridge that shot him, and sent out
the barrel as well ?
Was it his brother who did it ? Possibly ; who can
tell ?
If anything's fair in love, sure anything's fairer in
trade ;
Thinking what harm you may do isn't how fortunes
are made.

Well, I'm an old John Bull, fond of my comforts and
home.
How could we keep our comforts without such fellows
as Tom ?
Somehow it goes to my heart ; I'd cry, but tears are
in vain.
Worry old England who may, Tom will not fight
'em again.

THE BROOK.

WE are nearing it apace,
Its course black billows trace,
Where the swollen waters race
 In our way,
'Twixt rotten banks and steep
Flowing dark and swift and deep;
Are you shrinking from the leap,
 Gallant bay?

Deep, deep the meadows ride,
And you labour in your stride;
Heaving flanks, nostrils wide
 Tell you're done.
But brave, as oft before,
Be brave a moment more,
Then our troubles all are o'er—
 And the run.

Nor mine nor yours the blame
That our strength is not the same,
That my muscles ache, that tame
 Is your eye

At the end of such a course ;
Yet fate's resistless force
A beaten man and horse
 Must defy.

O'er upland meadows bright,
O'er sandy fallows light,
You little felt my weight
 At the start.
My thoughts half-formed you knew,
So keen my will to do,
As passed a thrill to you
 From my heart.

How gaping ploughmen stared
As their startled teams we neared,
Then swifter disappeared
 From their ken.
They wondered who or whence
As we romped from fence to fence,
And from the covert dense
 Crept again.

Full many a good steed's down,
Full many another's blown,
Full many a rider's thrown
 Indiscreet.
Torn pink, bespattered gear,
Not this the dandy wear,
Nor thus did they appear
 At the meet,

O fox, so sly and good,
At your brush how many rode !
How gaily we pursued,
 One and all !
Reduced to two or one
At the finish of the run
Still boldly riding on
 For a fall.

THE OLD YEAR PASSES.

THE tremor of a parting sigh,
A hushed lament, a feeble cry,
A snowdrop peeping out forlorn—
'Twas so the baby year was born.

Gay, suppliant, sad, with artless wiles,
Compound of April tears and smiles,
Laughter on lip and tear in eye,
Childhood his hobby-horse urged by.

Then bright locks waved, and bright eyes shone,
And hearts—such hearts—were lost and won.
O summer days ! O rose of June !
And fair fond arms unclasped too soon !

Then Autumn reaped his ample store ;
His flail rang on the threshing-floor,
Who yet had wished the granary bare
So love its emptiness might share.

Then wintry Age bent o'er his gold,
Loth to resign, too weak to hold ;
Or watched the faces in the fire
Glow, flicker, darken, and expire.

Ice are my tears ; my heart is stone ;
Since youth, love, hope have left me lone—
Dear leaf-strewn mounds beneath the snow—
Let poor December go.

OUTWARD BOUND.

THE night is dark and still,
And a mist is rising chill,
 Chill and cold.
We are leaving the loved shore,
And the friends we never more
 May behold.

Our ship glides o'er the bar ;
Now the lights gleam pale and far ;
 Ere they die
A spark from out the West
Glows, larger, gleams abreast,
 And goes by.

Glad voices reach our ears,
But our eyes are dimmed with tears ;
 Well we know,
As we pass into the night,
Our hearts were just as light
 Long ago.

Ours now the tossing wave,
And winds that howl and rave
 O'er the foam.

For them no dreams of strife,
But the joys of love and life
And of home.

Thus another takes our place,
As a smiling baby face
May be found
In the house whose open door
One has passed, for evermore
Outward bound.



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